



Sierra Club Four Lakes Group

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Department of Natural Resources
Blue Mounds State Parks Master Plan
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The Sierra Club Four Lakes Group appreciates this opportunity to comment on the future of Blue Mounds State Park and on the Blue Mounds State Park Master Plan.

The Sierra Club Four Lakes Group is your local branch of the Sierra Club. We are an all-volunteer organization dedicated to environmental education and conservation. The Four Lakes Group area includes more than 5740 members in the counties of Columbia, Dane, Dodge, Green, Iowa, Jefferson, Lafayette, Rock and Sauk.

The Four Lakes Group members and supporters are avid recreationalists who use the parks, trails, lakes and rivers of southwestern Wisconsin. We have a broad interest in the parks and open space lands across the region both for their recreational/hunting assets but also for their contribution to human and environmental health.

Blue Mounds State Park is located close to the heart of our membership in Dane Co. and the other large population centers in southern Wisconsin. Its location makes it the premier site for hiking and biking in the summer and skiing and snowshoeing in the winter. These silent sports are very popular across all four seasons.

Addition of a snowmobile trail crossing the park

In 2017, the **Sierra Club Four Lakes Group took a position in opposition to the proposal to create a snowmobile trail through Blue Mound State Park** on the basis of our support for silent sports, concern for public safety, and the existence of snowmobile trails already nearby. Our position has not changed.

The Department affirms that snowmobiling is anticipated to decline over the next 10 years. And that there was actually movement to explore a seasonal connector trail on private land to the west of the park. **We support the following:**

- **Leave the snowmobile access as status quo (Alternative 1- access along the side of the existing roads)**
- **Dedicate staff time to facilitate the creation of a seasonal connector trail between the Military Ridge Trail and snowmobile trails to the north based on private land and at the best location outside of the park (willing land owner, route etc.). The Department has experience in working with private landowners on such projects as the Ice Age Trail where the trail has been sited and flows between public and private lands.**

Adding a snowmobile thoroughfare to this small, precious and biologically and culturally rich park and beloved by silent-sports enthusiasts makes no sense whatsoever. This is all about getting from Point A to Point B without any park benefits and considerable detriment to current winter park users, wildlife and the park itself.

..to protect and defend the wild places of Earth...

Of the five senses, sight and sound are most engaged in winter. Snowshoers, hikers, cross country skiers take in the park's landscape and wildlife. You cannot hear the red tail scream or the exploratory probes of a downy or hairy woodpecker easily. You must pause and freeze on the snow and tilt your head to locate the bird. And the wildlife is there if you listen for it and observe the signs in the snow.

This proposed change is not about appreciating this park. It is about a thoroughfare, about getting from Point A to Point B, which makes the change incompatible with a master plan for a state park, especially one that is so appreciated regionally for its winter silent sports. This park offers a getaway, an opportunity to step back from motorized traffic and enjoy the quiet and clean air. Permitting snowmobiles to cross the park in a second way does so at the expense of all others, wildlife, and the very place that is supposed to be enjoyed.

Not every park has to meet every recreational need. Blue Mounds serves a large and active population of silent sports enthusiasts as well as campers. Families use this park for their first experiences with camping and outdoor recreation. And the local cross country ski clubs have developed programs drawing new and younger participants to the sport.

An important bioreserve

Blue Mounds Park is also an important bio reserve serving as a home for some of southwest Wisconsin's most iconic and some rare species. The scoping document clearly identifies the Oak Woodland and Southern Mesic Forest as habitats important to conservation. And that habitat exists capable of hosting several species of greatest conservation need.

The Pleasure Valley section of the park, where the proposed snowmobile thoroughfare is proposed, contains the southern mesic forest, serves as headwaters for Ryan Creek, an exceptional resource water and Class II trout stream, and contains the restorable remnants of a prairie oak woodland. The Blue Mounds forested areas are regarded as exceptional southern mesic forest providing additional habitat for rare species.

A snow mobile trail through Blue Mounds State Park is incompatible with and counterproductive to:

1. Protecting the integrity of the southern mesic forest in Pleasure Valley.
2. Protecting the headwaters of Ryan Creek.
3. Preserving the opportunity to restore the prairie oak woodland.
4. Protecting and preserving ecological habitats that support and protect important and rare species from disturbance or displacement.
5. Protecting the role of the parks as frontline defense for the impacts of climate change including water absorption and carbon sequestration.

Noise degradation

Constructing a trail for and allowing snow mobiles within Blue Mounds State Park is contradictory to maintaining and enhancing the experience of silent sports enthusiasts who often spend hours at a time in the park.

Currently snow mobilers have access to the Military Ridge Trail along the southern border of the park. They also use Mounds Park Road to connect to other trails nearby. As it is, snow mobiles have a significantly greater impact on noise in the park than the cars that use the road.

In either case, Blue Mounds State Park should be considering an ambient noise environment suitable to a natural area and the outdoor experience. Snow mobiles are known to regularly exceed the 88-decibel limit that is used in a variety of states including Wisconsin. We urge the Department to consider setting an ambient decibel goal for the park. A quiet suburb, for example, has an ambient level of 50db, a quiet rural area has an ambient level of 30 db. (Source: <https://www.chem.purdue.edu/chemsafety/Training/PPETrain/dblevels.htm>)

Rather than increasing the noise in the park, we suggest that snow mobiles are kept to the current road right of way and that the DNR consider additional noise abatement actions along the road and along the southern border of the park and the Military Ridge Trail. Snowmobiles regularly use roads to connect from one trail system to another all around the state of WI. This should remain the practice at Blue Mounds State Park.

Open additional narrow trails for hikers and snowshoers

Establish additional intimate hiking and snow shoeing trails. The bike community has been very vocal and the Department has responded by developing a large amount of single-track trail for mountain bikers and fat tire bikers. Hikers would also enjoy more trails that are narrow and intimate providing hikers with a tangible experience with the amazing landscape in the park.

Climate Change

Climate change and the integrity of forest and bio-reserves. As the impacts of climate change are felt more and more and the state begins to prioritize reducing carbon emissions and carbon sequestration, the Sierra Club advocates that:

- The DNR must consider the impacts of motorized recreational sports including ATVs and snow mobiles
- The DNR prioritize bio reserves, forests and other green spaces that serve as carbon sinks but also provide tracts of land where animals and plants have the opportunity to adapt with the goal of maintaining a diversity of species.
- The DNR reconsider proposals to cut trails that have a greater potential for washouts in extreme weather events.
- Calculate the contributions of parks including Blue Mounds towards carbon absorption and sequestration. And consider recognizing these important areas as a part of local and state climate mitigation plans.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the future of Blue Mounds State Park. The Four Lakes Group supports a continued focus on the silent sports at Blue Mounds State Park which is compatible with protecting the bio reserves and addressing climate change mitigation.



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Submitted on behalf of the Sierra Club Four Lakes Group